

asceticism, are inconsistent and contradictory. Nevertheless asceticism is only an aberration which starts from a highly virtuous motive. We must do what is right and virtuous because it is so. It is right and virtuous to fight sensuality in personal character and social action. The fight will often consist in acts which have no further relation to interests. By zeal the work of this fight absorbs more and more of life, and it may engage a large number associatively. It becomes the great purpose by which mores are built. Then the notion of pleasing superior powers by self-inflicted pain is thrown out, and all the primitive superstition is eliminated. We find a vast network of mores, which may characterize a generation or a society, which are due to the revolt against sensuality, either in the original purity of the revolt (which is very rare) or in some of its thousands of variations and combinations.

679. The definitions depend on the limit.

Especially in connection with food, drink, and sex the asceticism, of one age becomes the virtue of another. The ideas of temperance and moderation of one age are often clearly produced by previous ascetic usages. The definitions are all made by the limit. A stricter observance than the current custom is ascetic, but it may become the custom and set the limit. Then it is only temperance. It is often impossible to distinguish sharply between taboos which only impose respect for gods, temples, etc. (cleanliness, quiet, good clothing), and those which are ascetic. When the ascetic temper and philosophy assumes control it easily degenerates into a mania. Acts are regarded as meritorious in proportion as they are painful, and they are pushed to greater and

greater extravagances because what becomes familiar loses the subjective force from which the ascetic person wins self-satisfaction. Asceticism then becomes a mental aberration and a practical negation of the instinct of self-preservation. It leads to insanity.¹ If it takes a course against other persons, it explains the conduct of great inquisitors like Conrad of Marburg.²

680. Asceticism in India and Greece. Orphic doctrines. In India ascetic acts were supposed to produce not only holiness

¹ Galton, *Hered. Genius*, 239.
330.

² Lea, *Inquisition*, II,